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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002602

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DUMA THEATRICS: OPPOSITION STAGES WALK OUT TO PROTEST ELECTION RESULTS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Susan Elliott. Reason: 1.
4 (b), (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On October 14, deputies from all three "nominal" opposition parties of the State Duma, typically moderate in their criticism of the Russian government, walked out of the State Duma's plenary session in protest over vote rigging during October 11 local elections across Russia and the blocking by United Russia parliamentary leaders of a Duma discussion of these concerns. While the walk out was significant in that these very different parties collaborated to make a statement, pro-Kremlin LDPR and Just Russia party deputies returned to work on October 16 for business as usual. Medvedev had called for a more open, competitive political system with greater representation for parties other than United Russia, and the October 11 elections were largely viewed as a test of Medvedev's commitment to democracy. We expect little fallout for the ruling United Russia party over the theatrics. End Summary.

State Duma Walk Out

¶2. (SBU) Russia's nominal opposition parties -- the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) and Just Russia -- staged a rare act of disobedience on October 14, as dozens of their deputies walked out of parliament to protest recent flawed elections across Russia. It was the first time in nine years that all three minority factions had walked out in simultaneous protest. Deputies from United Russia continued the session and approved 19 draft laws in a little over an hour while opposition leaders met with representatives of the Presidential Administration concerning future action. LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy was first to lead his faction out of the State Duma session, followed by KPRF and then later (for separate reasons indirectly related to the elections) Just Russia. Interfax reported October 14 that Zhirinovskiy claimed that his party encountered blackmailing and threats, adding that his party did not recognize the election results. He called for a review of all vote tallies. KPRF party members spoke out against Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, blaming him for an "unworkable system." Just Russia leader Nikolay Levichev told reporters that while his party members were collecting material on legal violations to submit to the Prosecutor General's Office, its deputies walked out because they were not allowed to voice their opinions at a plenary session.

¶3. (SBU) Opposition parties set out their demands at a press conference following the walk out. KPRF leader Gennadiy Zyuganov and Zhirinovskiy declared that their factions would return to work only after meeting with the President, and they hoped that a meeting with Medvedev would take place earlier than October 27. Zyuganov suggested that Medvedev set up an independent commission of all parties, including those outside the Duma, to sum up the October 11 election

violations. After that, the results of the elections should be reviewed in court and, based upon the court's findings, should be corrected accordingly. He also demanded that the commission suspend Moscow Mayor Luzhkov, the President of the Mari-El Republic, and the Governor of Tula Oblast. Just Russia leaders did not participate in the press conference, but an unnamed representative told RBC news agency October 15 that the faction was ready to report back to work. Earlier, Just Russia faction leader Nikolay Levichev said they would be ready to resume work after getting guarantees that an investigation into the election law violations would occur, and that rules governing Duma discussions would be changed so opposition parties would have the right to voice their position on a regular basis. Levichev expected that the guarantees could be received during the October 15 State Duma meeting and that the faction would be back the next day. In a meeting with the Ambassador on October 15, Federation Council Chairman Sergey Mironov confirmed Levichev's version of the events (septel). On October 16, LDPR and Just Russia returned to the State Duma, while KPRF stated it would wait for a meeting with Medvedev before returning to the Duma. Anton Orekh, a commentator on the Echo Moskvy radio station commented October 16 that, "the 'uprising' was as much of a showpiece as the elections were."

Medvedev and Putin's Reactions

¶4. (SBU) On October 12, Medvedev praised the voting, describing the elections as "well-organized" and conducted "in accordance with the law." He also congratulated the ruling United Russia party for its strong showing. According

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to Interfax on October 14, prior to walking out, the opposition members of parliament had insisted on urgently meeting Medvedev to discuss the election results, which they claimed were rigged in favor of United Russia. However, Medvedev initially did not agree to change his schedule to meet with the opposition leaders and said he had no time to meet before his previously scheduled October 27 meeting with opposition faction heads. On October 16, Medvedev then agreed to meet with the opposition party leaders on October **¶24**. Earlier, he had called for a more open, competitive political system with greater representation for parties other than United Russia, so these elections were largely viewed as a test of Medvedev's commitment to democracy. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin expressed his support for a multi-party system and while on a visit to China this week, added that disputes over the elections should be resolved in court.

United Russia Stalwarts Defend Vote; Condemn Walk Out

¶5. (SBU) According to Itar-Tass on October 12, Boris Gryzlov, the chairman of United Russia's political council and State Duma speaker, admitted that numerous election rules had been broken. The State Duma website posted a story on October 14 indicating that Gryzlov scorned his colleagues from the opposition for "sabotaging" the Duma plenary session and called it a senseless "populist act." Later the same day, the opposition leaders in the State Duma demanded the resignations of Gryzlov and Vladimir Churov, chairman of the Russian Central Electoral Commission (CEC). According to Itar-Tass on October 15, Churov commented that all appeals to revise the election results were criminal and subject to punishment under Article 141 of Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, a provision related to interfering with elections. He also claimed that the walk out was related to the visit of "an important foreign guest" (Secretary of State Clinton, who was in Moscow October 12-14). Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov's press secretary Sergey Tsoi stated that the mayor would discuss the election violations "at an appropriate time." In the meantime, Luzhkov signed an order October 15 announcing that the deputies of the newly-elected

Fifth Moscow City Duma would hold their first session on October 21 after being sworn into office on October 20.

Comment

¶6. (C) In light of Medvedev's call for greater representation in national and regional legislative bodies for opposition parties, these flawed elections and his initial refusal to meet expeditiously with opposition leaders raise questions about how far he is willing or able to go to carry through on his commitment. The walkout seems to have been merely a ploy to make a public statement about the election results, one of the few steps available to the opposition in Russia's controlled political environment. For his part, Luzhkov seems to have successfully "brought home the bacon" for United Russia, though in doing so he may have further damaged his already frayed relations with the Kremlin. With Just Russia and LDPR back in the Duma, we expect KPRF members, too, to return soon. But, given United Russia's overwhelming control, opposition parties will need to be careful to maintain their minimal role in politics.

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